

IS YOUR BOARD HELPING YOUR ORGANIZATION OR HURTING IT:

The legal responsibilities of your nonprofit board of directors are pretty clear. The board:

- Ensures that your organization is fulfilling its mission.
- Guarantees that your organization complies with its bylaws and other rules.
- Reviews your financial performance.
- Hires and evaluates the CEO.

But, beyond those basics, a smoothly functioning board with a broad array of skills can be a godsend; while a quarrelsome, nit-picking board with thin experience can distract you at best, and bring down your organization at worst.

Dream Board or Scary Board?

Use this list of optimum behaviors to see which yours is.

- **An effective board looks at the big picture.** It is alert to signs of trouble before a crisis erupts and is always asking questions such as: "How are we doing in meeting our mission?" "Are we working the hardest on the most important tasks?" "Could we do things better and more efficiently?" "Where are we in meeting our long-range goals?"
- **A good board has a keen sense of priorities.** It works from an agenda so that it does not waste time on frivolous issues. It encourages planning and the use of planning tools, freely endorsing time and money spent on anticipating future problems and preparing for them.
- **The caring board provides growth opportunities for the staff.** Staff stability is crucial and the best way to achieve that is by providing employees with the means to develop professionally and personally. Staff retreats are encouraged and good personnel policies are constantly evolving.
- **A judicious board thinks before it acts.** When staff and board members disagree, every effort is made to understand the opposing side's position in order to come to a fair resolution. The board makes sure that the staff operates in a fear-free environment and feels confident that if they express their opinions, they will not be punished.

- **An efficient board values teamwork.** The board elects members that have skills in legal matters, accounting principles, and programmatic areas, and then fosters teamwork among them. The goal is to achieve the organization's objectives by utilizing board intelligence through teamwork. Staff should not have to act as referees among directors.
- **The outstanding board constantly evaluates itself and keeps improving.** It reviews the organization's mission annually and re-energizes itself through retreats and other activities. It invites outside expertise and educates itself in best practices. If your board exhibits these signs of health, you will be able to attend to your service mission fully confident that your board will back you up.